Theory and Application

C

Chords 3: Adding Simple Chords

*A*lthough there might be some artistry to setting chords to tunes, there is a scientific process behind it. This exercise aims to shine a little light on the method.

The tune below - *Chord Trousers* - is in the key of G, so our "palette" is the chord family in the key of G:
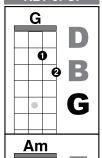
G Am Bm C D Em

All these chords are made up of 3 notes, and we're going to use that knowledge to apply the chords.

In the 1st bar, look at the notes: **B**, **D** and **G**. Now look for a chord in the G chord family which contains these 3 notes. There's

only one, so the 1st chord is going to be **G**. Now look at the second bar: what are the notes? Is there a chord which contains these notes? Write it in.

Some bars will have two chords, each based upon the notes in their respective halves of the bar. And sometimes you'll find that you might have a choice between 2 chords; in that case try them out, and one will sound more right to you than the other. For example, the 2nd half of the 3rd last bar: the important notes are **E** and **G**, which are contained within the **C** chord, but also the **Em** chord. Neither is wrong, but you'll prefer the *sound* of one over the other.
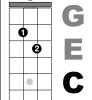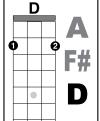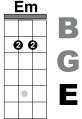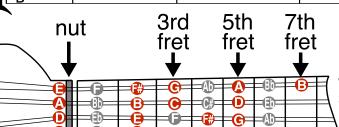
The CHORD FAMILY in the KEY of G:

Chord Trousers *(Nigel Gatherer)*

slow air

These are the notes found on the mandolin in "first position". The notes of the G scale are marked in red.

Fires at Midnight *(Stewart)*

slow air

Here's another tune you can try, composed by harper and concertina player Wendy Stewart. This time it's more ambiguous, often with a choice of two or three chords. I have given the note of only one or two notes in each bar - the important notes. Remember, try them out over the melody to see if you think the chord fits. Use your ears.